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INTERPROVINCIAL STANDARDS  
PROGRAM - A MODEL OF  
FLEXIBILITY AND COOPERATION

Tom Watson

# Skill Development Leave Task Force

Background  
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PROGRAM - A MODEL OF  
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INTERPROVINCIAL STANDARDS  
PROGRAM - A MODEL OF  
FLEXIBILITY AND COOPERATION

Tom Watson

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March 1983

This is one in a series of background papers prepared for the Task Force on Skill Development Leave. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Task Force or the Department of Employment and Immigration.






This is one of a series of background papers  
prepared for the Task Force on 2011  
Development. The report is intended to  
show the results of the Task Force's  
work and the views of the Task Force on the  
Department of Environment and Land Use.

## CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
1. BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	1
2. THE INTERPROVINCIAL STANDARDS PROGRAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE	2
3. COOPERATION	4
4. FLEXIBILITY	4
5. LATEST DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE TRENDS	6



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## Interprovincial Standards Program - A Model of Flexibility and Cooperation

### 1. BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Apprenticeship has a long and honourable history. It originated with the medieval craft guilds of Europe, in which the structure of masters, journeymen and craftsmen was established. It controlled entry to a craft by the process of indenture, and, by adhering to the concept of "time-serving", ensured a good and common standard of workmanship. It was, and still is, a process of learning by doing whereby the skills of the trade are imparted from one generation to the next. Notwithstanding the survival of many a quaint custom of apprenticeship initiation and completion, the European transplant became rooted in a more vibrant society. Moreover, a federation of provinces and territories, each with its own jurisdiction over vocational education and trades certification, would ensure the growth of a very disparate apprenticeship system. Couple this with the demands of an emerging economy, uneven growth and the realities of geography, and we have the beginnings of a unique form of federal/provincial cooperation - the Interprovincial Standards Program.

This federal/provincial cooperation in vocational training and apprenticeship started sometime after World War I, and during the twenties and thirties was given considerable support by the federal government, but it was not until 1944 that the first cost-sharing agreement was negotiated. From that time, cooperation grew as both levels of government attempted to arrive at some form of national standards. The general thrust of this early period was towards some form of uniform standards of skills for journeymen initiated on an interprovincial scale. Only by a mutual recognition of provincial certification could a flow of skilled tradespersons respond to the widespread demands of the labour market. If mobility was to be ensured, a nationally



recognized endorsement of each trade was required. From this arose the necessity to develop occupational analyses and to embark on an ambitious trades examination and certification program. In 1959, the first interprovincial examination was introduced when a journeyman passed the motor vehicle repair examination and was issued with the first "Red Seal" - the passport to his trade in any province or territory in Canada.

By December, 1982, over 150,000 Red Seal recipients from 24 trades had benefitted from the Interprovincial Standards Program.

## 2. THE INTERPROVINCIAL STANDARDS PROGRAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The Interprovincial Standards Program is aimed at increasing the mobility of journeymen in the construction, maintenance, repair and services trades; improving and upgrading tradesmen's training programs and developing similar, but not necessarily uniform, instructional courses within the provinces and territories.

Under the terms of the British North America Act, the provinces have jurisdiction over the granting of trade certificates of competence. The certificates are valid only in the province or territory in which they are issued, and are not normally recognized by other provinces or territories.

Under the Interprovincial Standards Program an understanding was reached among the provinces and territories whereby, under certain conditions, their certificates would be mutually recognized. It was agreed that there would be a free and mutual interchange of apprenticeship and training regulations, course materials, training aids, etc., related to the interprovincial trades.



The role of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission is to coordinate the activities of the provinces toward reaching mutually acceptable levels of competency among journeymen in a number of trades.

The Interprovincial Standards Program Coordinating Committee (ISPOC) is the coordinating body through which all policy decisions concerning the Program are channelled.

The Committee is made up of one representative from the Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Branches of the Departments of Labour (or their equivalent) of each province and territory and one or more non-voting representatives from the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission. The Commission also provides a full-time national coordinator as part of the federal contribution to the program. It is this particular and unique form of federal-provincial cooperation that has proven to be an historic way of working together and which might well serve as a model for other areas of national concern.

Tradespersons who pass the interprovincial examination in their trade are awarded an Interprovincial Seal. This seal is placed on the individual's Provincial Completion of Apprenticeship Certificate or on his/her Tradesmen's Qualification Certificate.

The Interprovincial Seal is not an automatic permit to work in any province. The tradesman must obtain a current provincial certificate from the province in which he/she wishes to work. The certificate may be obtained without having to show any further proof of competence and with little administrative delay. Additionally, the tradesman must also obtain

current municipal or local licences, if required. It should be noted that some municipalities recognize the Interprovincial Seal and issue their licences without any examination.

The operating arm of the senior committee is the Interprovincial Standards Examination Committee (ISEC) which reports to the ISPOC and is responsible for making detailed recommendations on the construction, administration and analysis of the interprovincial examinations. The full-time coordinator of the ISPOC also acts on this Committee and in this case has a vote.

### 3. COOPERATION

It is this structure which has retained its early vitality and has responded to the demands of a burgeoning economy. As a result of federal encouragement and provincial efforts, apprenticeship in Canada grew from just under 3,000 apprentices in 1946 to nearly 100,000 in 1979. Today, under the aegis of the Interprovincial Standards Program, journeymen from 24 trades are able to seek Red Seal endorsement by successfully meeting examination requirements.

### 4. FLEXIBILITY

The emergence of mega projects that characterized the seventies tested the efficacy of the Red Seal program as never before. "Come-By-Chance", "James Bay" and the "Tar Sands", each attracted a pool of skilled labour into its ambit. As contractors vied for their place in the sun, apprentices as well as journeymen were uprooted from their province and from the institution providing their in-school or off-the-job training. Once again the cooperative spirit of the interprovincial program allowed a flexible response.



The impact of the recent boom in Alberta on apprenticeship training was studied by the Committee and the results were gratifying. The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Branch of Alberta Advanced Education and Manpower tabled a report at the September 1982 meeting of the ISPOC. This was titled "Credits granted to apprentices having partially completed an apprenticeship in another Canadian jurisdiction upon becoming indentured in the Province of Alberta." The survey studied the history of 300 apprentices from the carpentry, electrical and plumbing trades and how they fared in Alberta. Only 14 of the total may not have received the full credit which was expected. However, in these instances the credits granted were the result of consultation between the apprentice, the employer and the Branch staff. Of those involved with technical training only 21 were identified as experiencing difficulty. This figure is approximately one-third higher than the normal pattern for the entire apprentice population. It was speculated that a number of reasons might appertain:

- (a) the sequence of training;
- (b) actual differences in course content;
- (c) claims of training which could not be substantiated;
- (d) suitability of the individual to the occupation;
- (e) lack of personal effort;
- (f) length of time out of the trade in the course of not being able to sustain employment in the home jurisdiction and subsequently finding employment in Alberta; or
- (g) time expired between the last technical training in the home province and attending technical training in Alberta.

It was pointed out, and rightly so, that many of the above would be applicable to apprentices within their home province.

The important conclusion of the report was that the majority of incoming apprentices were assimilated with relative ease. However, there were serious questions raised regarding training standards and standardization which will be discussed later.

## 5. LATEST DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE TRENDS

Vocational education and training, like other areas of society, is now facing the challenge of the eighties. The advent of new technologies, the era of specialization, the blurring of demarcation lines and the erosion of old skills are all threatening our traditional trades and occupations. Indeed, entirely new occupations are emerging that will require regulation and cooperation if they are to be adopted and adapted into the industrial scene.

Regardless of whether we focus on the new or the traditional, both the on-the-job and the off-the-job elements of training will require a more flexible approach.

In 1982, the National Training Act was passed. Inspired by two federal reports: "Work for Tomorrow" and "Labour Market Development in the 1980s", and after consultation with the provinces, business, labour and education groups, the legislation had three main thrusts:

- to meet the occupational skill requirements of the Canadian economy in the 1980s,
- to support industrial adjustment and adaption to technological change, and
- to increase the employment opportunities of adult Canadians.

Even before certain Red Seal trades were identified as "occupations



of national importance", the members of the Interprovincial Standards Program were already responding with a whole litany of alternatives to the traditional off-the-job training component.

Aided by financial assistance from the federal government, employers and public institutions were asked to experiment with:

- competency based training,
- multiple entry/exit classroom instruction,
- computer-assisted, individualized instruction,
- day-release of apprentices for in-school instruction,
- use of employers' training facilities for formal instruction,
- improved on-the-job training, job rotation, etc.,
- development of trade instruction manuals suitable for home study,
- preparation of training modules and self-paced learning programs.

The new pragmatism, however inspired, is lending impetus to further areas of cooperation. Economies of scale, common standards and standardization, the streamlining of training time and indentured time, the sequencing of topics, all aid and abet the thrusts of the National Training Act but place new stresses and strains on the training and examination systems administered by the Red Seal program. The need for flexibility sometimes conflicts with the demand for standardization. However, the Committee characteristically, is responding to change in the face of a changing labour market. Upper age levels for entry into apprenticeship programs are disappearing; computerized item banks to produce high-quality, randomly-selected trades examinations are being developed; common core skills leading to occupational families before eventual specialization are now a feature of some provincial programs; interactive video training packages and simulated work experience are all

symbolic of provincial and federal initiatives in tune with the times.

The Federal/Provincial Conference of Ministers Responsible for Manpower Matters held this year in Edmonton was an expression of contemporary cooperative federalism where regional and provincial needs mirrored national needs. This mutuality of purpose resulted in the establishment of a Federal-Provincial/Territorial Committee of ministers responsible for Labour Market/Manpower matters. It also resulted in the provinces and territories informing the federal government of their intent to explore the feasibility of developing an interprovincial/territorial certification system.

Thus the process has come full circle: from the early years of the century when narrow jurisdictional rights were jealously defended and the federal role was passively supportive, to a fully-fledged partnership that recognizes the need for a comprehensive, cooperative human resource strategy.

If flexibility, compromise and cooperation are to be the watchwords of new and expanded federal/provincial initiatives, then the model is at hand - the Interprovincial Standards Program.



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